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ABSTRACT

Noting that parent involvement in their children's education is a crucial contributor to children's achievement, this study investigated the relations among family factors, parental involvement in children's learning activities within and outside of Head Start, and children's outcomes related to literacy, numeracy, social skills, and behavior problems. Data were collected by means of Fall and Spring parent interviews, teacher ratings of children's social skills and problem behaviors, and administration of the Woodcock Johnson Math and Letter-Word ID subscales. The findings indicated that in the Fall, parents who were most involved with their children in activities at home and in the community were more likely to include mothers with higher levels of education. Larger families tended to have less involvement in Head Start than smaller families. The level of Fall home activities was highly significantly related to Spring home activities. Parents' participation in Head Start activities over the course of the year was a significant predictor of home activities with the child in the Spring. There were no significant family demographic or activity predictors of the pre-math outcome. Family size and income were significant predictors of the literacy outcome. A family's involvement in activities with their child at home and in the community was significantly positively related to Letter-Word ID. Parent involvement in Head Start activities did not contribute to the cognitive development outcomes. Parents who reported more Head Start involvement in activities that included their child had children whom teachers rated more highly on social skills. (KB)

Head Start Parents' Roles in the Educational Lives of Their Children

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Parental involvement in their children's education is a crucial contributor to children's achievement (Slaughter-Defoe, Nakagawa, Takanishi, & Johnson, 1990). Accordingly, parental involvement is one of the four required cornerstones of Head Start. The purpose of this paper is to investigate the relations among family factors, parental involvement in children's learning activities within Head Start and outside of Head Start, and children's outcomes.

This paper presents results answering three main research questions:

1. What family factors are related to parents' activities with their child at home and parents' activities within Head Start?
2. Does participating in Head Start parent involvement activities lead to greater involvement with the child at home?
3. Are family activities at home or parent activities within Head Start related to children's cognitive and social development?

The Model (overhead)

Family/child characteristics

Child gender
Family size
Family income
Mother educ.

Family Activities

Fall home act. w/child
Parent invl. in Head Start
Spring home act. w/child

Child Outcomes

Literacy
Numeracy
Social skills
Behavior problems

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Measures (overhead)

- Fall and spring parent interviews
 - Home activities with child (NHES questions)
 - Parent participation in Head Start (spring only)
- Spring teacher ratings of children on SSRS
 - Social Skills and Problem Behaviors
- Spring child assessments, Woodcock Johnson
 - Math and Letter-Word ID subscales

The fall and spring parent interviews included demographic questions and questions about the parents' involvement with their child in activities around the home and out in the community. These question were taken from the National Household Educational Survey weekly and monthly activity questions, and include items like: In the past week, have you or someone in your family told child a story, taught him letters, words or numbers, played with toys or games indoors, etc. If so, how many times? In the past month, have you or someone in your family done the following things with the child: visited a library? Gone to a movie? Visited an art gallery, museum or historical site? If so, how many times? The score on this measure is just the total of all Yeses to the items. We did not weight them for frequency for these analyses.

The parent interview in the spring also included questions about the parent's participation in Head Start activities, questions such as "Since the beginning of this Head start year, how often have you volunteered 9or helped out in your child's classroom? Observed in the child's classroom for at least 30 minutes? Helped

with field trips or other special events? Attended parent-teacher conferences?

Participated in Policy Council or other Head Start planning groups?

To account for differences between sites in numbers of missing items, this measure is a mean score ranging from 1-3 with 1 being no participation and 3 being frequent participation (3 or more times in each activity).

Children's social skills were rated by their Head Start teacher in the spring using the Social Skills Rating Scale. This measure results in 2 scores, the Social Skills subscale and the Problem Behaviors subscale, both standardized by gender. The spring child assessments included the administration of the Woodcock Johnson Math and Letter-Word ID subscales which result in age standardized scores with a mean of 100.

Means and SDs (overhead)

	N	Mean	SD
Fall activities (wk/mo)	521	6.03	2.60
Spring activities (wk/mo)	165	5.57	2.80
Parent inv. in Head Start	166	1.85	.39
WJ Letter-word ID	247	93.25	12.25
WJ Applied probs	249	93.81	15.74
SSRS Social skills	184	100.15	15.04
SSRS Behavior probs	183	102.91	13.51

1. What family factors are related to parents' activities with their child at home and parents' activities within Head Start? (overhead)

<u>Outcome</u>	<u>Significant predictors</u>
Home Activities w/child	Mother's education*** (+) Being a GSU subject***** (-)
Parent involvement in HS	Overall model n.s.
Child-focus subset	Overall model****; Family size** (-)
Non-child-focus subset	Overall model***; Family size* (-)

This first question was tested with 2 regressions using Child Gender, Family size, Family Income, and Maternal Education as predictors. In the fall of their Head Start year, parents who were most involved with their children in activities at home and in the community (the Home Activities measure) were more likely to have mothers with higher levels of education. Other family demographic variables were not related to the frequency of Family Activities, but being a participant from the GSU sites was (warmer weather down south leads to more activities?)

None of these same family factors were significantly related to Parent Involvement in Head Start. However, when this variable is split into its 2 main factors--parent involvement in activities with the child (classroom visits, field trips, for example) and parent involvement in activities that don't involve the child (meetings, conferences, etc.) the overall model was significant and in both cases Family Size was significantly related to less involvement in Head Start.

2. Does participating in Head Start parent involvement activities lead to greater involvement with the child at home? (overhead)

Outcome: Home Activities with Child in the Spring

Variables in the model:

- Family Size
- Family Income
- Mother's Educ.
- Fall Home Activities****
- Head Start Activities***

The second question was "Does participating in Head Start parent involvement activities related to greater involvement with the child at home?"

The analysis for this question involved predicting the level of Home Activities with the Child in the Spring, taking into account Family Size, Family Income, Mother's Education and the level of Home Activities in the Fall. None of the family factors were significant, but the level of Fall Home Activities was highly significantly related to Spring Home Activities. Importantly, over and above this factor, the parents' participation in Head Start activities over the course of the year was indeed a significant predictor of Home Activities with Child in the Spring.

SEE FIGURE 1

3. Are family activities at home or parent activities within Head Start related to children's cognitive development? (overhead)

Outcome: Letter-word ID (Woodcock Johnson)

Variables in the model:

- Child Gender
- Family Size*** (-)
- Family Income** (+)
- Mother's Educ.
- Spring Home Activities* (+)
- Head Start Activities

The third question involves the relationship between parent involvement in activities with the child at home and parent involvement within Head Start as they relate to children's cognitive and social development at the end of their Head Start year. We broke this into 2 questions, one for cognitive development and one for social behavior. For cognitive development, there were no significant family demographic or activity predictors of the pre-math outcome, but the model for the literacy outcome--Letter Word ID--was significant. Family size and income were significant predictors of this literacy outcome, but over and above them, a family's involvement in activities with their child at home and in the community was significantly positively related to Letter-Word ID. See Figure 2.

Parent involvement in Head Start activities did not contribute to this outcome.

3b. Does parent involvement within Head Start relate to children's social development? (overhead)

Outcome: Social Skills Scale of SSRS

Variables in the model: Family Size
 Family Income*
 HS Parent Involvement--Child-Focused*
 HS Parent Involvement--Non-Child-Focused

Although parent involvement in Head Start did not contribute to the literacy outcome measure, it did contribute to the teachers more positive view of the child's social skills. Parents who reported more Head Start involvement in activities that included their child (classroom volunteering, field trips, etc.) had children whom teachers rated more highly on Social Skills. (Also see Figure 3.) Parent involvement in meetings, conferences, and other non-child-related Head Start activities was not predictive.

Conclusions

Parents with greater participation in Head Start activities were more likely to participate in other family and community activities that are important for children's learning. These findings suggest that to the extent Head Start can promote greater parent involvement within the program, parents might also become more involved with their children outside of the program. Given the Family Size finding (that larger families tend to participate less), Head Start programs might try to have more activities that involve all family members. Finally, although they tend to be related to different types of child outcomes, parents' participation with their child in home and community activities and parents' participation in Head Start activities--particularly those that happen within the classroom or with the class (including child and teacher)--seem to be important for their children's social and cognitive development.

REFERENCE:

Slaughter-Defoe, D., Nakagawa, K., Takanishi, R., & Johnson, D.J. (1990). Toward cultural/ecological perspectives on schooling and achievement in African- and Asian-American children. Child Development, 61, 363-383.

RELATION OF PARENT HS INVOLVEMENT TO PARENT INVOLVEMENT WITH CHILD

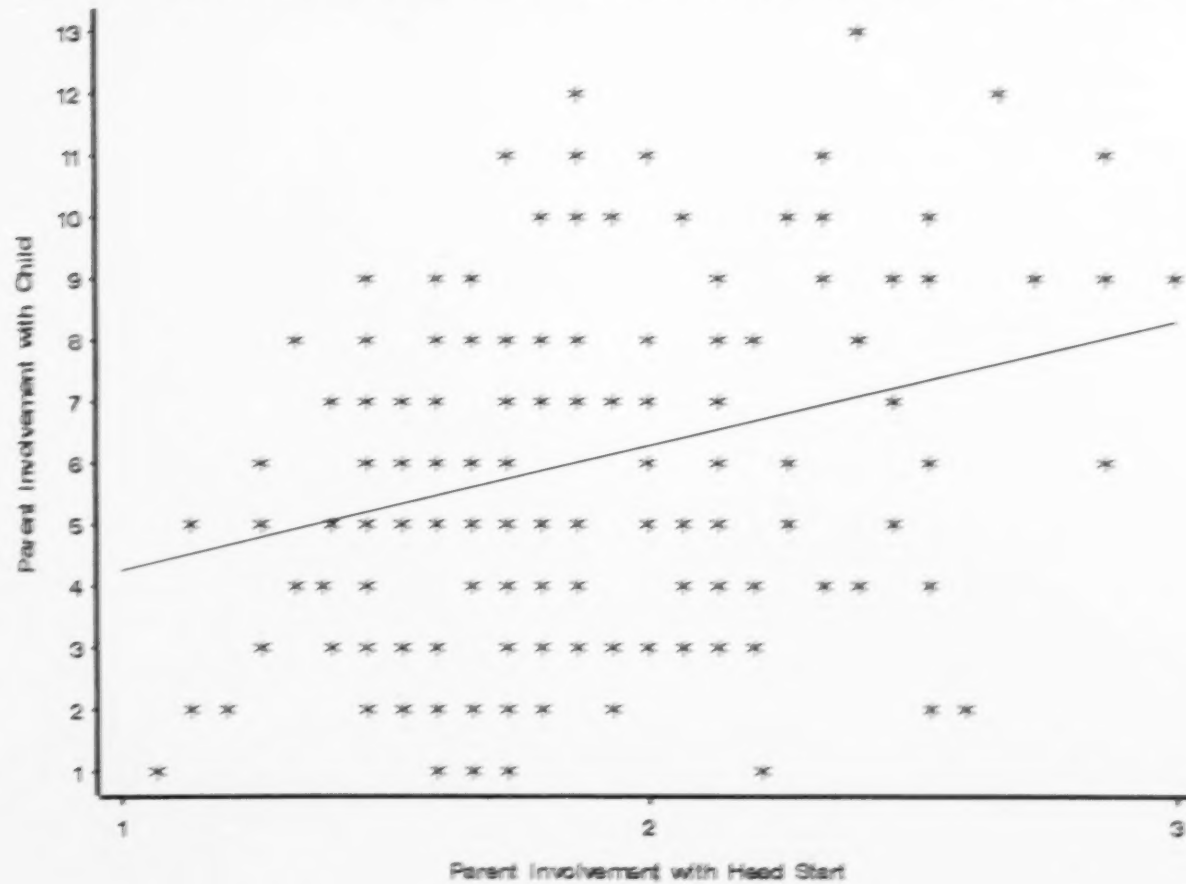


Figure 1

RELATION OF PARENT INVOLVEMENT WITH CHILD AND W-J LETTER-WORD ID

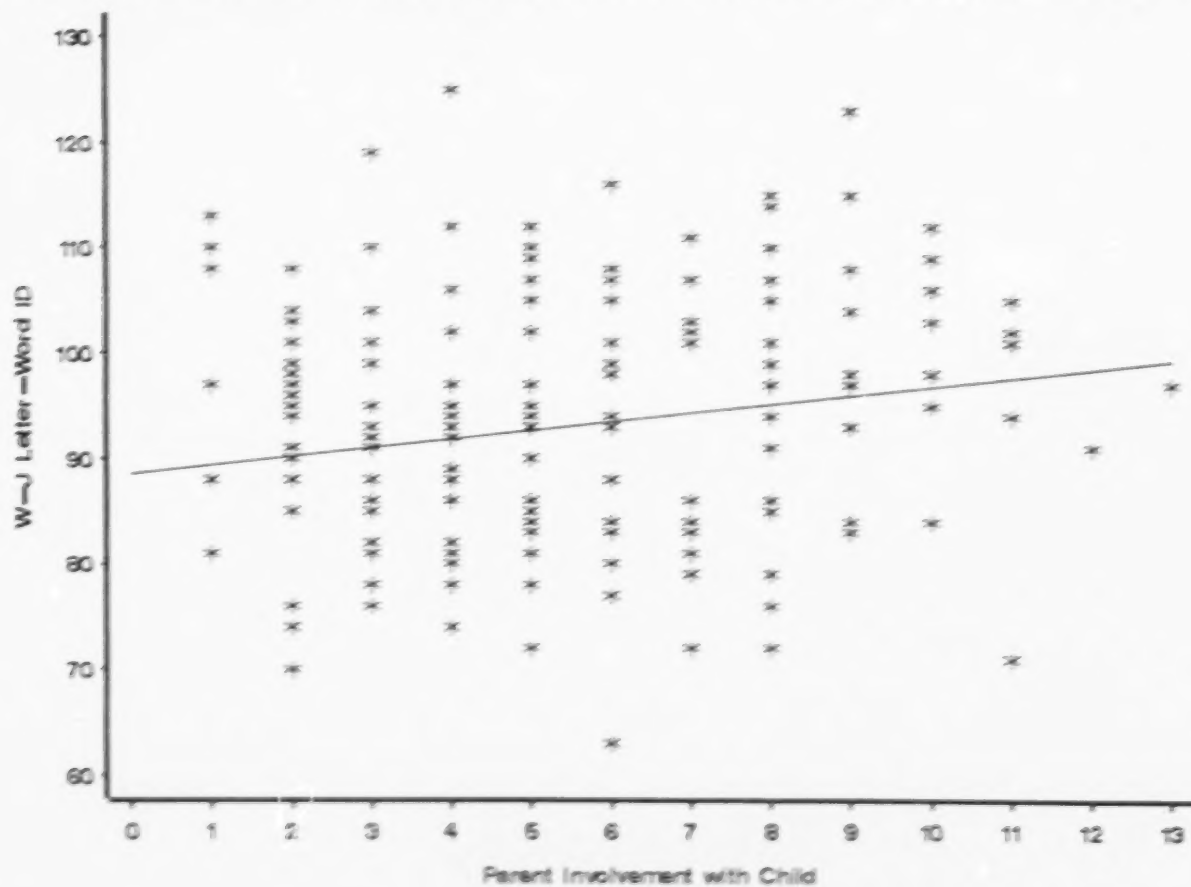


Figure 2

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Figure 3